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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: IRANIAN INFLUENCE IN BASRAH - SLOW, SUBTLE AND STEADY

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CLASSIFIED BY: Mark Marrano, Deputy Regional Coordinator, Basrah  
Regional Embassy Office, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (S/NF) Summary. The Iranian Government is focused on quietly spreading influence by facilitating travel to Iran, investing in different projects and organizations in Basrah, and working with Iraqi nationals with strong personal ties to Iran. The opinions expressed by Basrah Regional Embassy Office (REO) contacts only differed regarding the degree of Iranian influence. Binding Basrah province with strong political and economic ties, Iran ensures that one of the most economically significant provinces of Iraq will not only be a friendly neighbor, but a close ally as well. End Summary.

#### Money Talks

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¶2. (S/NF) The Iranian Government is focused on quietly spreading influence in southern Iraq. To gauge the extent of Iranian influence in Basrah, the Deputy Regional Coordinator heard from ten different individuals representing a wide variety of backgrounds. According to Ghali Najam Muter, Basrah Provincial Council and National Accord Party member, the south is quietly being influenced by Iran. He stated there are many offices in Basrah that disguise themselves as tourist agencies for travel to Iranian religious sites, but they are actually fronts for the Iranian Government. He said that one group in particular "Said Al Shohada" (The Martyrs) not only facilitates travel to Iran, but provides Iranian government funding to various NGOs, sports organizations and youth clubs in Basrah. Ghali said that the US Government needs to counter Iranian influence by being more proactive in funding similar projects for the city of Basrah through NGO's and different groups.

¶3. (S/NF) Ali Al Amri, the Chief Editor of the local newspaper, "Zahrat Al Basrah," stated that "Said Al Shohada" provided him with a special pass in lieu of a visa to visit Iran for a press conference. He added that the organization also provides these passes for visiting various religious sites in Iran. Al Amri believes that Iranian influence in Basrah has grown in the past year. He opined that the increase of religious fervor in Basrah is a direct result of Iranian influence and suggested that local imams are on the payroll of the Iranian government. Al Amri pointed out that if it weren't for these imams, the people of Basrah would be like they were before, tolerant of the Christians and allowing stores to sell alcohol and nightclubs to operate. With regards to religious

instruction, Bassam M. Al Temimi of the NGO, the General Human Rights Society of Southern Iraq, said he knew of workshops for women being conducted by Iranians that encouraged them to stay at home, not work and wear the veil.

¶4. (S/NF) A local reporter for Reuters in Basrah, Abdul Razak Hameed, stressed that Iran is influencing Basrah by funneling money to various groups and individuals. He admitted, "I have never seen any Iranian in Basrah, but I feel Iranian influence everywhere." He said Basrah desperately needs money to rebuild; an opinion that was echoed by a prominent businessman who stated that the city currently needs a lot of infrastructure investment, which the Iranians are eager to provide. As part of an official trade delegation, this particular businessman was invited by the Iranian Government to a trade show in Kermanshahr, southwest of Tehran.

¶5. (S/NF) The funneling of Iranian money is also prevalent in the security forces according to Shaykh Kadhim al Ribat, a local tribal leader. Shaykh Kadhim stated that the Iranians are quietly taking over the security forces by giving money to different political groups and militias. He added that the Iraqi Border Police, instead of controlling who comes into the country from Iran, is acting like a "welcoming committee" for the Iranians.

Iranian Iraqis  
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¶6. (S/NF) The Basrah Governor once referred to the prevalent Iranian influence in Basrah as being the result of the double "I's," the Iranian Iraqis. He said that during the last decade, many Iraqis have either lived in Iran for a long period of time or have repeatedly visited there. These individuals now have strong personal or professional ties in the form of Iranian wives or Iranian money respectively.

¶7. (S/NF) This same opinion was expressed by the Chief of Police, Hasan al Swaidi, who stated that the Iranian influence

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in Basrah is tremendous. He pointed out that all the Iraqis that fled to Iran 10 - 15 years ago have returned to Iraq with Iranian women, Iranian children and Iranian ideas. Al Swaidi added that these individuals are quietly taking over the security forces and the provincial council. He concluded that the assassinations that have occurred in Basrah have links to the Iranians who are killing off the old Baathists and members of the intelligentsia.

¶8. (S/NF) With regards to political parties, SCIRI appears to be the party of choice for the Iranian Iraqis. Julie Hughes, Director of Political Parties for the NGO National Democratic Institute, who has been in Basrah for three years, stated that "SCIRI is Iran." She added that the party member base is composed mostly of 45-65 year olds with strong ties to Iran.

¶9. (S/NF) Iranian influence in the Basrah Provincial Council is also subtle, but prevalent. The Provincial Council (PC) member, Imam Baha Jama al' Deen, a well respected, independent member of the PC, stated that there are provincial council members who have Iranian "consultants." He added that there are also organizations in Basrah that actively promote Iranian interests in a low profile manner. Imam Baha mentioned that the Iranian Government has received many warnings from the western countries to not interfere in Iraq, especially in the south, so Iran is very careful and very subtle in its interference.

Hearts and Minds  
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¶10. (S/NF) Comment: The above conversations with the different individuals show the subtle, slow and steady nature of Iranian influence in Basrah. Through the quiet funding of projects and the encouragement to travel to Iran, the Iranian Government is laying the foundation for a city that will at least be extremely

sympathetic, if not completely on its side in the political and economic spheres. With regards to the latter, the influence is not only in the form of investment into infrastructure projects, but also in the daily trading of fresh fruits and vegetables. The Director General of Iraqi Ports, Captain Hussain Abdallah, commented that many Iranian dhows daily cross the Shatt al Arab River to supply fresh fruits, vegetables, and dairy products for the Basrah market. From supplying basic commodities to funneling money to rebuild the city, the Iranian Government has an apparent effective plan to win the hearts and minds of the local population. End Comment.

MARRANO